

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8602

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, NI
SUBJECT: FMG ACTS TO AVERT A NATIONAL DOCTORS' STRIKE

REF: LAGOS 8256

1. THE NATIONWIDE STRIKE OF NIGERIAN DOCTORS SCHEDULED FOR JULY 12 IN SUPPORT OF STRIKING DOCTORS IN LAGOS HAS BEEN CANCELLED FOLLOWING A MEETING BETWEEN CHIEF OF STAFF YAR'ADUA AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NIGERIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (NMA). IN ANNOUNCING THE CANCELLATION ON Y TIONAL TELEVISION, YAR'ADUA SAID A PANEL WILL BE SET UP ON WHICH BOTH THE NIGERIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL AND THE NMA WILL BE REPRESENTED TO ADVISE ON REGULATION OF PRIVATE PRACTICE IN THE COUNTRY.

2. YAR'ADUA'S ACTION FOLLOWED A SUCCESSION OF MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE VARIOUS PARTIES TO THE DISPUTE WHICH CULMINATED IN THE NMA CALL FOR A 24 HOUR NATIONAL WALKOUT:

-- INITIALLY, LAGOS DOCTORS' MEETING AT LAGOS UNIVERSITY TECHING HOSPITAL (LUTH), VOTED TO EXPEL FROM THE NAMA THE STATE COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH AND TWO MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF WHO DRAFTED THE EDICT;

-- IN AN EMERGENCY MEETING LAST SUNDAY, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
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NMA STATE BRANCHES MET AT LUTH AND ENDORSED THE SIX DAY OLD STRIKE BY LAGOS DOCTORS PROTESTING THE LAGOS STATE PRIVATE HOSPITALS EDICT AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S BAN ON PRIVATE PRACTICE;

-- THE PHYSICIANS SOUGHT LAGOS HIGH COURT REPUDIATION OF THE EDICT ON THE GROUND THAT IT CONSTITUTES "ENSLAVEMENT" CONTRARY TO THE CHAPTER 3 PROVISION OF THE 1963 CONSTITUTION PROHIBITING

SERVITUDE;

-- THE DOCTORS' LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE DECIDED, HOWEVER, INSTEAD TO TAKE THE CASE DIRECTLY TO THE COURT OF APPEAL, A MOVE WHICH IS PERMISSIBLE UNDER NIGERIAN LAW;

-- ON JULY 6, LAGOS STATE GOVERNOR COMMANDER N. KANO MADE A SPECIAL TELEVISION BROADCAST ORDERING THE DOCTORS TO RETURN TO WORK, BUT ON THE FOLLOWING DAY ONLY 27 DOCTORS APPEARED AT LAGOS GENERAL HOSPITAL;

-- IN ANOTHER BROADCAST ON THE WEEKEND KANO DECLARED THAT "THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOW DECIDED TO END THE WAR OF WORDS WITH THE STATE BRANCH OF THE NMA." HE ACCUSED THE DOCTORS OF BLACKMAIL AND VOWED TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS.

3.

THE IMPACT OF THE DOCTORS' STRIKE HAS BEEN DRAMATIC. DAILY HEADLINES HAVE DESCRIBED PUBLIC SUFFERING AND OUTRAGE. UNTIL RECENTLY, EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND. RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS, NIGERIAN ARMY HOSPITALS AT IKOYI AND YABA AS WELL AS THE NIGERIAN AIR FORCE HOSPITAL AT EBUTTE-METTA, HAVE OPENED TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE DURATION OF THE STRIKE. AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT IS THAT THE LACK OF PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL CARE HAS BEEN A BOON FOR PRACTITIONERS OF "TRADITIONAL MEDICINE." ONE NEWS REPORT CITED INCREASING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE FLOCKING TO "HERBALISTS" FOR RELIEF FROM A WIDE VARIETY OF AILMENTS.

4. COMMENT: THE FMG ALONG WITH THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS HAS
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APPARENTLY BECOME INCREASINGLY ANGRY WITH THE DOCTORS IN THEIR APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO PROTECT THEIR LUCRATIVE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES. LABOR COMMISSIONER HENRY ADEFOPE TOLD THE EMBASSY POLITICAL/LABOR ASSISTANT ON JULY 7 THAT THE FMG FEELS LAGOS NMA CHAIRMAN DR. BEKO RANSOME-KUTI IN FACT WANTS REVENGE AGAINST THE ARMY FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS ROCK STAR SON'S KALAKUTA REPUBLIC HEADQUARTERS. ADEFOPE SAID THAT THE DOCTORS' STRIKE WAS AN "IRRESPONSIBLE" ATTACK AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT UNDER THE GUISE OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION.

5. IN ANY CASE, WITH YAR'ADUA'S ACTION, THE DOCTORS' STRIKE PROVIDES ANOTHER VIVID EXAMPLE OF CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICS IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY IN WHICH BOTH SIDES REFUSED TO COMPROMISE AND FINALLY THE FMG WAS FORCED TO ASSERT ITS AUTHORITY.
EASUM

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